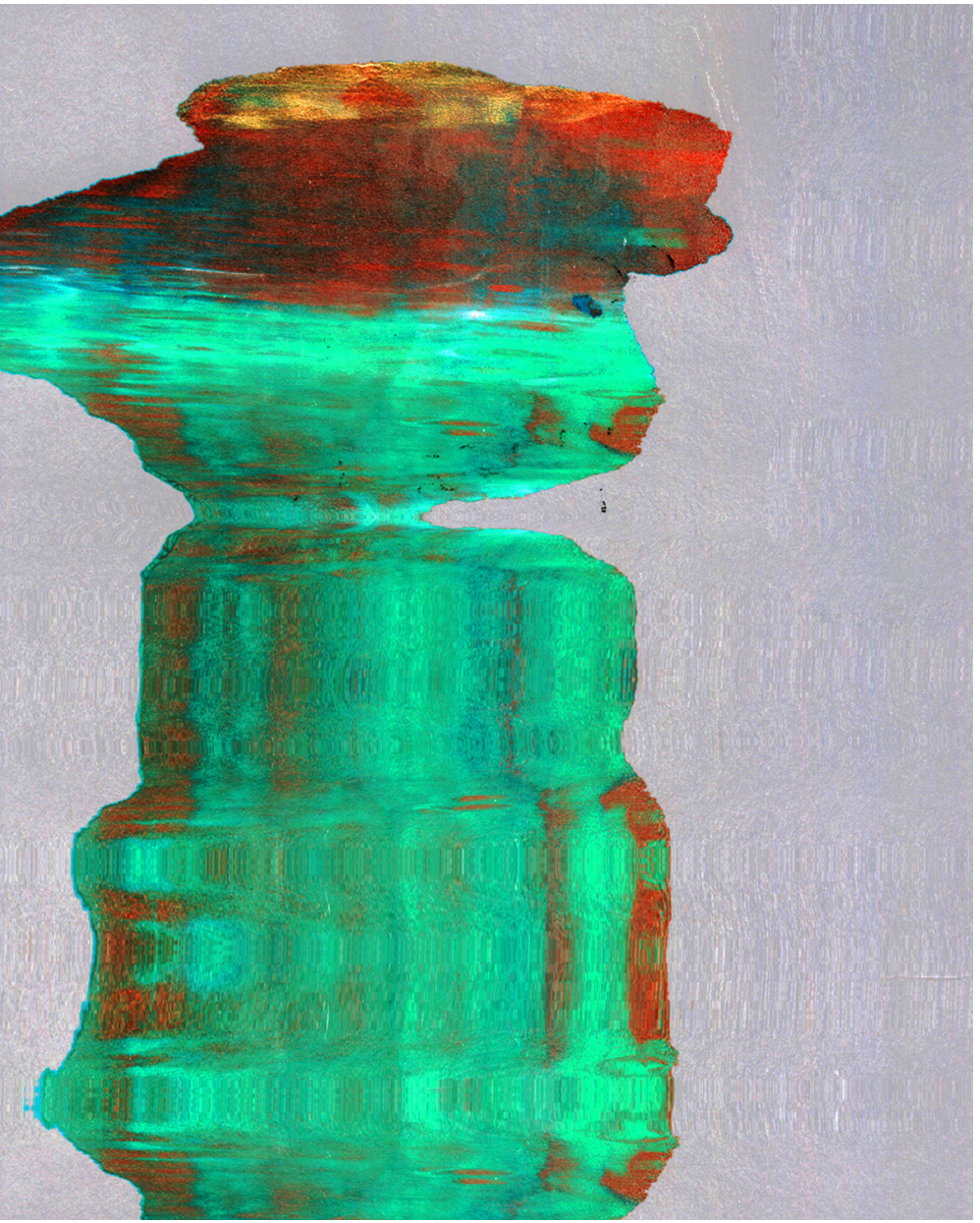
November / December 2018

THE RITUAL ISSUE

THALIA



'five' by Jessica Pye

Thalia is a celebration of the many forms of creative expression, and of the individuals behind them.

Some of the featured artists wrote to us of disciplined creative routines, others of breaking habits or finding new ones. Many referenced quiet daily moments that ground them—a cup of tea at night, arranging flowers in the kitchen, taking time to recall the moments for which they are grateful.

We feature each artist in their own voice so that you too may find joy in learning how Kate makes paint come alive, how Michelle's rituals transcend location, how Isa finds ritual in remembering.

Thank you for being a part of this community. And to all our submitters, thank you for giving us this window into your inspiration, your process, and your purpose. Sharing your work is our favorite ritual.

The Women of Thalia

All artwork corresponding with poems is by the talented Morgane Richer La Flèche

Celebrating

Kate Dunn

Lisa Baird

Antonia Showering

Claire Pope

Emilia Donnelly

Maja Ruznic

Wendy Chen

Jessica Pye

Johanna Bear

Brenda York

Michelle MacKinnon

Jan Croteau

Sophie Klerk

Stefanie Stark

Daina Savage

Ashleigh Trim

Addie DeLong

Isabella Borgeson

Kate Dunn photographed in her studio by Michelle Marshall

contusion

black amnesias of heaven

Kate Dunn

"My recent work has been a question of replacing the use of paint to imitate with the representation of paint as itself. I find myself in a dialogue with the material where I am meeting it in new forms and I encounter new states of feeling through these meetings. As if paint is presenting itself to me."

Having undergone a classical training in Florence, my practice looks at the contemporary languages of paint with reference to the historical. Having spent four years in such rich surroundings, I find myself returning to those encounters as opportunities to discuss the evolution of painting and in particular the materiality of paint. My work remains largely abstract as to encourage the experience of paint as paint, as oppose to its imitation of something else, yet through the use of a historical structure I am contradicting this very abstraction as I reference a large archive of imagery. In their adaption of the historical and contemporary the paintings become a kind of conglomerate, a contemporary fossil that belongs to no specific time.

These works are from the series Profanations, which takes its name from the notion in which religious artworks are the property of God and sacred, however if these artworks are returned to the property of the people, they then become profane.

During my training I became a skilled technical painter, able to recreate what I saw in life onto the canvas. Yet when I left that environment, I realized my relation to the material I worked with was limited. I could only view paint as a tool to imitate, to become flesh, cloth, an apple or a vase, but what about paint as paint?

My recent work has been a question of replacing the use of paint to imitate with the representation of paint as itself. I find myself in a dialogue with the material where I am meeting it in new forms and I encounter new states of feeling through these meetings. As if paint is presenting itself to me.

Kate Dunn photographed by Michelle Marshall

turbulent tumbling, my frentic fumbling

swollen sickened and smiling

profanations installation

Lisa Baird

"Ritual for me is fundamentally about transformation, or at least transition. Evoking a change, or honouring a change already underway."

I am a writer, a performance poet, a community acupuncturist and a queer white settler living on Attawandaron/Chonnonton/Mississaugas of the New Credit territory (Guelph ON). My poetry has appeared in various journals including *Arc*, *Rattle* and *Plenitude*. She is a contributor to the Lambda-award winning anthology, *The Remedy: Queer and Trans Voices on Health and Healthcare* (Arsenal Pulp Press, 2016) and to *GUSH: Menstrual Manifestos for our Times* (Frontenac House, 2018).

How can we talk about ritual without speaking of the transformative power of fire? This poem is one of a series I'm writing using only words found in the Hawthorn Farms seed catalogue. Working within the restrictions with regards to word choices feels like its own kind of ritual. (Shout out to Anna Swanson's excellent Garbage Poems series that inspired these seed catalogue poems www.garbagepoems.com.)

Burnpile

all words transcribed from the Hawthorn Farms seed catalogue

It wants to press
you flat. You can
feel it midribs—on bad
days, like a buffalo
standing on your
inhale.

Go back & empty
that house. Make
a heap in the yard.
Throw in the grinding
clocks with their blistered hours.
The papered-over insomnia.
The spineless cardboard
angels. All the years
you were easy
harvest.

Every brittle, wilted
heirloom. Even your name
is a catalogue
of overheated seeds
on the yellowing wind—
remember
what you came here for
& speak it like a bloom
of trumpets.

Do not ask
the fire to cleanse
anything. Just stand
close. Body steaming.
Eyes clear.

Ritual for me is fundamentally about transformation, or at least transition. Evoking a change, or honouring a change already underway. When I need to shift something my go-to is getting outside, among trees. I spent six seasons watching for fires at a remote lookout in northern Alberta. Walking my dearest and most familiar trails (to the river, to the southern valley, to the birch forest) became ritual for me. This poem is about one of those walking rituals that went astray.

You might wonder why I wandered so deep

without a compass, without the skills, truth be told,
to use a compass once I'd gotten lost

having taken my grouchy self into the forest to ask
the spruce saplings and fireweed for the grace to forgive

my girlfriend for the things she'd done the previous winter—
grouchy meaning, in this case, pissed off and heartsore.

You might wonder how I went from murmuring
to the forest spirits to urgent open-throated bargaining

with god, to promising some deity
that if I got out of these woods alive I'd drop

the grudge against my girlfriend and her other lover.
You might wonder if the lateness

of the hour had something to do with it,
if the trickles of tiny streams, the quaking aspen,

the cheeky riot of wildflower and fern
start to lose their charm after three or four hours

of ever more desperate circling, of where the hell
was that goddamn path, the sharp scent of fear

in my sweat, soaked from the knees down, calves
and thighs studded with devil's club thorns, the kind

you're digging out of your flesh for weeks
afterwards—if you've planted trees in BC or Alberta

you know what I mean—and let's remember
that I didn't know if I had weeks afterward,

given how skinny I am and how cold the nights
are that late in the season, my main thought

by the sixth hour to just keep moving and stay
warm as I blundered into a hornet's nest and ran

from the indignant swarm while the sunset
painted the sky every ominous shade of red

and coyotes howled, my own throat past hoarse
from hollering for someone, anyone to help me.

You might wonder if I kept my end of the deal
afterwards, if after two forest officers took the back roads

to my lookout and, having no idea where I'd gone
leaned on the truck horn until I followed that blessed

sound out of the dark toward the lit window of my cabin
and if, after my girlfriend drove five hours the next day

just to give me a back-rub and fry me a steak,
I was able to forgive her.

And when I think now of our breakup, years afterwards,
all I remember is the baby bird that had fallen from the nest

to sprawl, pink and pathetic on the neighbour's driveway,
how I grabbed the shovel from where it leaned against

warm brick to sever the head from the scrawny body—
it took two tries—then rushed off, promising a decent

burial when I returned, how weakly it thrashed
when I lifted it hours later, how I had to drop it again

to smash the skull flat with the shovel. I think
of the mess that a partial decapitation makes

when good intentions are the opposite of mercy, I think
of wracking sobs, I'm so sorry, I didn't mean to do that

as I buried it alone on my knees in the dark in the backyard
wishing it could have been a briefer dying.

You might wonder why I'm circling back
to any of this, why I still can't pry it out of my flesh

having forgiven things worse than that winter, or why
I thought god would decide to save someone from hypothermia

or not, based on whether she forgave
her girlfriend. Why this seemed the best

I could offer, worth my life in that moment,
the one thing that could get me back home.

Some rituals happen only in the imagination, but they're no less powerful. Especially if you write them down.

Renovation Suggestions for the Childhood Home

A blowtorch to the kitchen table, the plastic
surface melted
into a slow wide smile.

Pastel raindrops drawn over the ghastly
linoleum, all that orange
and brown retired.

Patio stones torn
from the crabapple's roots.
Small altars in the living room
with offerings
for the three dead gerbils, two cats.

Each whispered unhappiness scraped
from closet walls.

A decade of journals buried
in the backyard.

7,000 candles blazing
in the basement,
glitter shaken over cobwebs, corners
quivering.

Skylights hacked
into the bedroom ceilings,
mosquito netting hung
over the beds.
Snowdrifts in winter. Spectacular

molds in the carpets by early May.
Grasshoppers creeping in by August,
clicking

from the light fixtures.

Life's Conveyor Belt

Antonia Showering

"Paint has this ability to tap into your subconscious and it's not unusual to get strange happenings when you stand back — even though it was your hand that made every mark."

My paintings try to capture the ephemeral nature of memory. I tend to layer several (personal) recollections on top of one another so when the viewer approaches the canvas there are still remnants or hints of previous decisions that lead to the final surface they are confronted with.

The landscapes depicted are an amalgamation of the various places I am from: England, Switzerland and China. This helps me make sense of being mixed heritage. The figures inhabiting these half remembered, half invented spaces are often those I love, or have loved.

'The Hug' began as a platonic embrace with my best friend but as the paint took over I stood back from the canvas and was greeted by someone I was seeing at the time! Paint has this ability to tap into your subconscious and it's not unusual to get strange happenings when you stand back — even though it was your hand that made every mark.

'Life's Conveyor Belt' was painted soon after my younger brother told me that him and his girlfriend were going to have a baby. I used the landscape's perspective to mirror time's progression. It's about the inevitability of moving up on the generation ladder. Since graduating from my masters in painting at the Slade I have been travelling a bit thanks to painting! I was in a two person show in Los Angeles in August and just got back from a six week residency in northern Italy. It's mad to think my work is taking me to all these new, exciting places and I'm excited about where it will take me in the future.

The Hug

Claire Pope

"Though collected objects hold my memory and my emotional response to witnessing moments of ecstatic quietude while collecting, I cannot assume these emotions to be translated. Instead, I can only inspire questions."

My work explores the notion of ecstatic quietude and the emotion of wonderment found in Nature during the current Anthropocene Age (a time in which the collective activities of humans have substantially altered Earth) and the evolution into the Post-human. I do this through an exploration of materiality. I collect both natural and man-made materials then combine them through a variety of methods with the intention of creating a new form which raises questions about our current relationship to Nature.

Throughout this ontological process of collecting, I take note of my personal emotional response to the awe-inspiring beauty and sublime experiences of the natural world. I observe intricacies of the microcosmic and macrocosmic aspects of Nature, such as varying patterns of veins within the flesh of a leaf or a tidal wave of wind rolling through a field of grass before a storm. Works are often inspired by the site-specific location of which I find objects as well as distinct moments of interconnectedness to the source of being. This connection, this emotion of wonder, these moments of ecstatic quietude are a reminder of birth, mortality, morality, ethics, and existential purpose during the present age which is centered on progress, industrialism, consumerism, and technological advancement. Af-ter collecting, I then translate these observations into a new mutated form using synthetic materials such as silicone, LED lighting, or resin. Light and ethereality are central to my creations. Through an exploration of a variety of natural and man-made objects, I thus created a form which seeks to draw the viewer into a small world of wonder.

I created The Peace of Wild Things with the idea of ecstatic quietude, place, and interconnectedness in mind. I began by sitting under a large white pine tree on our farm. The floor beneath the tree was covered in fluffy burnt umber pine straw. Pine cones were scattered among the bed of straw. They sat peacefully, un-rattled by the wind which forced the green limbs above into a slow dance. I sat on that straw and I observed. I took deep breaths. I paid careful attention to the warm smell of decay and life around me. I took note of a fallen fence near the tree. I let my mind wander, then brought it back to the present. I felt life swirl around me. Then, I wrote. I described the moment through pictures and words. Then, I collected. I picked up pinecones, straw, and leaves from other trees that had blown to that place. I cut pieces of rusty metal from the fence nearby. Once the materials were collected, I preserved them using a large wooden press made by hand from scrap wood on my farm.

After constructing a paper armature, I created a new form using the materials I preserved and the observations from my time on the forest floor. I conceived a two-part sculpture. The base represents the forest floor and features pieces of pine cone, rusted fencing, and leaves. The hanging kinetic work above the floor piece features collected leaves and feathers with the intention of reflecting the lightness and floating ethereality of the captured moment. The parts are meant to interplay and relate to one another through an invisible tension of the lack of touch. Holes were left in the tops of each so that light, the source, may shine through. Thus, illuminating the invisible interconnection of all living beings within this universe.

Within all of my work, collecting and experience, is a common theme. Though collected objects hold my memory and my emotional response to witnessing moments of ecstatic quietude while collecting, I cannot assume these emotions to be translated. Instead, I can only inspire questions. What is my relationship to Nature? What is your relationship to Nature? What is our relationship to Nature during the present Age of the Anthropocene?

The Peace of Wild Things

Emilia Donnelly

"I am a poet; my body and mind are where I work."

I am a poet; my body and mind are where I work. Writing is something I have always done, but I never tried to be good at it until I came to college. Now, I'm a fervent writer. My subject matter is particularly concerned with what it means to have a body, and what it means for God(s) to be without one. The rituals within my writing vary; in some poems it is the writing itself wherein the ritual manifests, in others the ritual speaks to the tradition of humans being bodied and what that inheritance means.

Body Binary

One diminished God suppressed
in body is tethered by sinew,
veins roped liquorice and blood clots, nerve
endings computing touch from human
to haunting.

Embodied in the flesh,
kept female in the space eked
from the universe, body is continued
disruption.

Body's skin remembers body's skin,
the millimetric border between one
and the next, dying and not-dying;
in the moments following
its expiration.

Without body, everything
is extracorporeal. Senses
released into the astral planes
where every religious god
claims the others do not
exist.

Indivisible

The white skin of birches: wet sheets wrap
the wood of sun-washed stalagmites.

The day spreads out in blue jaggedness split by their arms,
projecting a puzzle onto the path they fence.

Together they are bare and alike in conformity.
The only thing separating one from the other

is the image of one

delineating the space between its anteriors.

They are forever in concordance, unwavering
in their demand for reverence.

In limbo beneath protracted shadows, I venture
into the cuts,

daring them to notice me, enfold me firm
beside them in solidarity. I

step into the mirror-forest, swing
between slits of sky and immediately

stand naked inside the splintered remnants
of a ribcage. Jabbed pieces in the Earth, equal.

I split my hands upwards, warm my palms to the
light gasping into their creases.

My arms are bare and alike, my bones
channel two feet into the dirt until

I am no longer seen.

Reshuffling For Tomorrow's Ghosts

Five Women (After Picasso's Les Demoiselles d'Avignon)

Maja Ruznic in her studio, photographed by Theo Schear

Maja Ruznic

For me, the act of painting is about intimacy. It's a desire to connect to something that feels both personal as well as Eternal.

"…Memories do not only tell what happened but also how it was experienced and how a particular event has been remembered and contextualized at both individual and group levels."- Hariz Halilovich (Places of Pain)

The Caves Are Where the Oldest Go

The figures in my new work are festive and look as if they have returned from some unknown ritual. The celebrations they take part in are to shake their bones and bring out stories hiding in them. I think of their limbs as shareable—one arm belongs to two or three bodies and two sets of feet carry them all. They are all engaged in a love-and-hate affair while they laugh and sob in unison to mourn and curse the dead. The island on which they live provides all that they need to survive. The plants shower them with rejuvenating stardust, which heals eczema and other skin conditions while swimming in the lake soothes menstrual cramps. The caves are where only the oldest go.

For me, the act of painting is about intimacy. It's a desire to connect to something that feels both personal as well as Eternal. It is a way of communicating that is pre-verbal, incoherent in the traditional sense, but vital for survival. I start by rubbing the pigment into the canvas until the stains start taking on interesting forms. The pleasure comes from the absurdity of the stain, which for me represents a nothingness that's full of potential. The stain is always an accident. It symbolizes carelessness and irresponsibility, which I find to be radical and freeing; the rapture, my subjects so desperately need. The process of painting is about navigating the space, the threshold where subject and object are weaving through each other—in a constant exchange of information and meaning.

I'm interested in trauma because the effects of the Yugoslavian war in the mid-90s had a deep effect on me. As a child refugee, I grew up observing the various shapes trauma was taking in the bodies of my family members. A shape-shifter, trauma, dwells in the human psyche and has the power to deform overtly or discreetly, depending on the host, their experiences and how those experiences are integrated. I experienced trauma as an insidious and formless presence and as an adult, I continue to experience it on a political level. Even though I no longer identify as a refugee, I still see various acts of othering permeate the political landscape in which I find myself.

Yarrow and A Crooked Thumb

The Mother and Her Poets

The Help

an interview with
Wendy Chen

Cambridge, Massachusetts
October 16, 2018
Interview and photographs by Julia Haney

Wendy and I met on one of those blustery fall days where you can almost watch summer transition to fall, in the entrance of the Harvard Art Museum (and my favorite café in Cambridge). Both from, and recently returned to, Massachusetts, we sat down to talk translations, representation, and process.

Thalia featured several of Wendy's poems and translations in our September/October issue, but we wanted to get to know more about the woman behind these piercing poems. Wendy is poised and chooses her words carefully, but is also quick to laugh at herself and her eccentricities. She is a poet, a sculpture, a fiction writer, a magazine editor, and a fierce advocate for underrepresented groups.

What is your process? How do you know when a poem or a sculpture is done?

In the beginning, the idea for a poem or an artwork is often just floating around in the back of my mind for a while. At some point, I'll come across an image or a phrase—something will give that idea an actual push of inspiration. That's when I know, "this is one of the ideas I can run with!"

And then I just have to sit down and do it! Usually if the idea has been percolating for a while, I've also been thinking about its structure or form. For writing, the overall original structure doesn't change much in revision, but the images and line breaks will. Revision is a big part of the process. Thankfully, I have many friends who are writers, artists, and editors who are wonderful readers of my work and provide invaluable feedback.

What is the intersection of your sculpture work and your poetry? Where do they overlap? How do they serve different purposes for you?

After graduating from Wellesley, I was deciding between pursuing an MFA in sculpture or poetry. In undergrad, I spent more time on sculpture and not as much on writing. Writing had always come harder to me. I agonize over writing in ways I don't with visual art, so I wanted to challenge myself by pursuing an MFA in poetry. Even now, I know I need to actively keep up my writing, whereas visual art will always be a part of my life.

I come to sculpture and writing through the same initial creative process. For example, I compose my writing in a visual sense. When I first imagine my poems, I imagine them as a series of images and color. However, the puzzles I focus on for sculpture and writing are different, so I know going into composing whether it's going to be a poem or a sculpture. But within my writing, the genre I'm working in can switch—for example, a poem I wrote is now the basis for the novel that I'm revising!

The novel follows four generations of women, beginning with one woman during Republican-era China and ending in modern-day America. Much is based on my grandmother's stories of her mother and her experiences with the rise of the revolution, and the ideas that came out of it, which have relevance in modern-day America.

Unearthings is Wendy's new book! Available for purchase here

gallery

Much is based on my grandmother's stories of her mother and her experiences with the rise of the revolution, and the ideas that came out of it, which have relevance in today's political climate.

Do your poems intersect with what's going on politically now? Your grandmother comes up in so many beautiful tender ways in your poems. Do her stories and experiences feel separate from what you're experiencing now politically or do they intersect?

The 2016 election definitely gave me a wakeup call. I've always been interested in exploring Asian American women's experiences, but the political climate makes me feel more urgency to write.

This resonates with me—I tell Wendy that political events in the last couple years have often been the spark of creativity (driven by frustration or anger) but then at other times it can be inundating and dampening of creativity.

Absolutely. The first few months after the election, it was very hard to write. Drawing and painting didn't require me to verbalize exactly how I was feeling so they were easier to access immediately.

And yes, my grandmother plays a big role as my access point to storytelling. She and my grandfather would recount all these incredible stories they had gathered over the years, from from family stories to Chinese myths.

My first language was Chinese, as my grandparents, who only speak Chinese, took care of me while my parents were in school. So, in a sense, I came into language through their stories. I've always been particularly interested in oral storytelling, especially as that was often the only medium through which women's voices were recorded. It's a great interest of mine: imagining the ways that each retelling may change or evolve the story, so that it becomes this fascinating historical archive of voices when it reaches the listener.

I also grew up watching Journey to the West—a Chinese TV show that was really popular in the 90's. It's a story of how Buddhist scripture was transported from India to China. On their epic journey, the heroes encounter all these demons and mythical figures. The show definitely demonstrated the magical nature of storytelling for me.

I was curious about the translation, if you're still doing it, and how you house these two types of poetry separately in your mind?

My first major translation project was translating the work of Li Qingzhao. Li Qingzhao is not frequently translated in the US even though she's considered the greatest woman writer in China. Her life is incredible—she made a name for herself as a writer when she was still a teenager, had to flee her home and seek refuge in the south due to war, successfully divorced her second husband, and was even jailed for a brief time. Yet throughout all her hardships, she persevered in writing and producing new work. The more I translated Li Qingzhao's work, the more I was inspired by her imagery, structure, and voice.

During the time of Li Qingzhao, women were not supposed to write. Li Qingzhao wrote under a male pseudonym, though eventually people realized she was a woman. It was thought that writing and disseminating one's work was an unchaste and taboo act for a woman, as she was exposing herself and her inner thoughts. For example, in a classic parable illustrating filial piety, sons burned their mother's writing to protect her legacy.

The ci form, the form Li Qingzhao is most renowned for, also fascinates me. The form itself is technically rigorous. Each ci is written to a musical score with a fixed character count, rhyme scheme, and tonal pattern. Unfortunately, most of the tunes themselves been lost.

In terms of subject matter, ci were written from the point of view of a woman expressing feelings of longing or desire for a lover. Usually, the elite male literati who wrote these ci would have them performed by female musicians for their entertainment. It makes you think about who possesses the voice of women and owns the ability to craft the female identity.

Translating her work posed so many interesting new challenges for me, especially given that she wrote almost 1000 years ago! There are words or phrases whose meaning we don't exactly know. There are even some poems with lines that have been lost and several possible substitutions that you as a translator must choose between.

For me, the first part of the translation process is always research. For my own poetry, research is never the first impulse. When translating Li Qingzhao's work, I looked into the historical context, literary criticism, and existing translations of each poem to help form the basis of my understanding. The number of poems Li Qingzhao wrote is often debated, because sometimes anthology editors would claim to have discovered a new poem of hers to better sell their anthology. So, there are poems "of hers" found many centuries after her death. As a translator, I had to determine which ones to include in my manuscript.

The second part was getting the meaning down in English, while simultaneously trying to make it an effective poem. Then afterwards, in revision, I come back to my translation with a poet's eye and think "does this work?". In revision, that is where translating feels most like writing my own poetry.

Tavern Books will be publishing my Li Qingzhao translations next year. The book is titled The Magpie at Night, which is a phrase taken from one of her poems. Actually, I just put together initial ideas for the cover! I also did the cover for my book of original poems titled Unearthings.
For my next translation project, I'm planning on translating "Xuanji Tu" by the Chinese female poet Su Hui. I'm excited to tackle the particular challenges of "Xuanji Tu" as it is most complex matrix poem ever written and forms about 3,000 smaller poems.

Did you find yourself changing things post research and translation? If something isn't working how do you know what to do to fix that while still honoring the original poet's voice?

I've been working on my translations for a few years. Giving each translation time to rest and breathe helps me revise them. My thesis advisor, Brooks Haxton, is a translator himself, so his generous feedback was invaluable as I worked on my translations.

Translating for me is much more a series of intentional editorial choices than writing my own poems. Essentially, each translation is a blend of the original poet's voice and the translator's. No translation is a perfect equivalent. Part of defining yourself as a translator is deciding what to sacrifice and what to preserve from the original. For me, I chose to sacrifice rhyme and, to a lesser degree, form (such as syllable count or tones which have no English equivalent) in favor of imagery.

Ultimately, there are many solutions to translating a poem and I hope my translations will inspire more people to translate Li Qingzhao's work!

You are working on a lot! Can you tell me a little more about Figure 1 and how that fits into what you're doing right now?

I started Figure 1 with Anna Mebel, a friend and classmate at Syracuse, after the election. We were both feeling a bit defeated, and so we started the journal hoping to create a platform and resource for underrepresented voices.

Just by looking at the VIDA Count (organization that measures the gender gap in major literary publications and book reviews) and seeing those numbers was very discouraging. At the same time, a lot of people believe that minorities have an easier time getting published, which is not true if you look at the numbers.

Do you have an ideal space to create in or rituals that you have within or outside those spaces?

I have so many rituals, although I'm trying to break some because I don't think they are very healthy! My ideal time to write poems is from 2-5am in my room, listening to one song on repeat. Each time I write a poem, I have to find a new song.

It's usually a really bad song—very poppy with a particular beat that I can write with or against. The rhythm helps me write. I also think I'm just very sensitive to presences, so if there are people awake then I'm aware of them moving around in their spaces. I like working in complete isolation!

Recently I've been trying to break this ritual, just because it's not conducive to a good night's rest. I'm having an easier time writing my novel in the morning. I need less inspiration to write a novel (or any long form). If I only worked on the novel when I'm inspired, it would never get written!

Is there overlap ever between novel and poetry? Do you think of those processes as different? Is poetry more daunting?

Writing a poem feels more daunting when I initially sit down, and I have to sustain a particular initial impulse for the entire first draft. If I break from that feeling, I won't be able to finish. But for a novel, I can sit down and start to write. Some days, I can only write a paragraph or two. But other days, if the writing is going really well, then I can eventually build up to that same feeling of inspiration that I get for a poem. While writing a poem, I am constantly thinking cutting words. However, for the novel, I give my words more room to grow. It's a very different mindset.

A writer once told me what you think of as your weaknesses are actually the qualities that make your style unique. I can't write long chapters. All my chapters are about a thousand words. I used to think I needed to stretch them out to 3,000 words, but soon realized it was not going to happen. Ultimately, these "weaknesses" define your style!

What do you want people who are reading your poems (original and translations) to experience and/or take away from them?

Fundamentally, I think all writers wish to inspire their audience. I write for readers who identify with themes in my work—particularly regarding underrepresented identities and womanhood. I hope my readers can either be inspired to write or express their voice in another manner. My writing is also, in some ways, an act of empathy for my past self. I write what I would have liked to read or felt comforted by as a child.

For translations, I hope to bring more diverse voices into an English-speaking reader's consciousness. Historically, most English-language translators have been white men translating other men. As a woman of color, I want to highlight women's contribution in literature so they are not erased or forgotten about. Part of that mission is translating work by women. For any writer, reader, or artist, exposure to diverse voices will only help your craft.

What brings you peace and what keeps you up at night?

Even though now I know that what keeps Wendy up at night is listening to a pop song on repeat in the middle of the night!

The entire process of creating art involves a lot of anxiety. Peace is finishing a creative endeavor and being satisfied with its final form. When you release something you create into the world—by publishing a poem or exhibiting in a gallery space—the work is out of your hands. The ways that people interpret or evaluate your work is out of your control. The release of control at the end of creating also brings a lot of peace.

Recently, a young composer of Asian descent sent me a score of one of my poems set to music. It was so interesting to see the ways each syllable was broken up across the chords. I was touched and glad she found some creative inspiration in my work. When I hear from readers and other artists, that brings me peace too.

Left to right; Untitled, face and salt closure

two

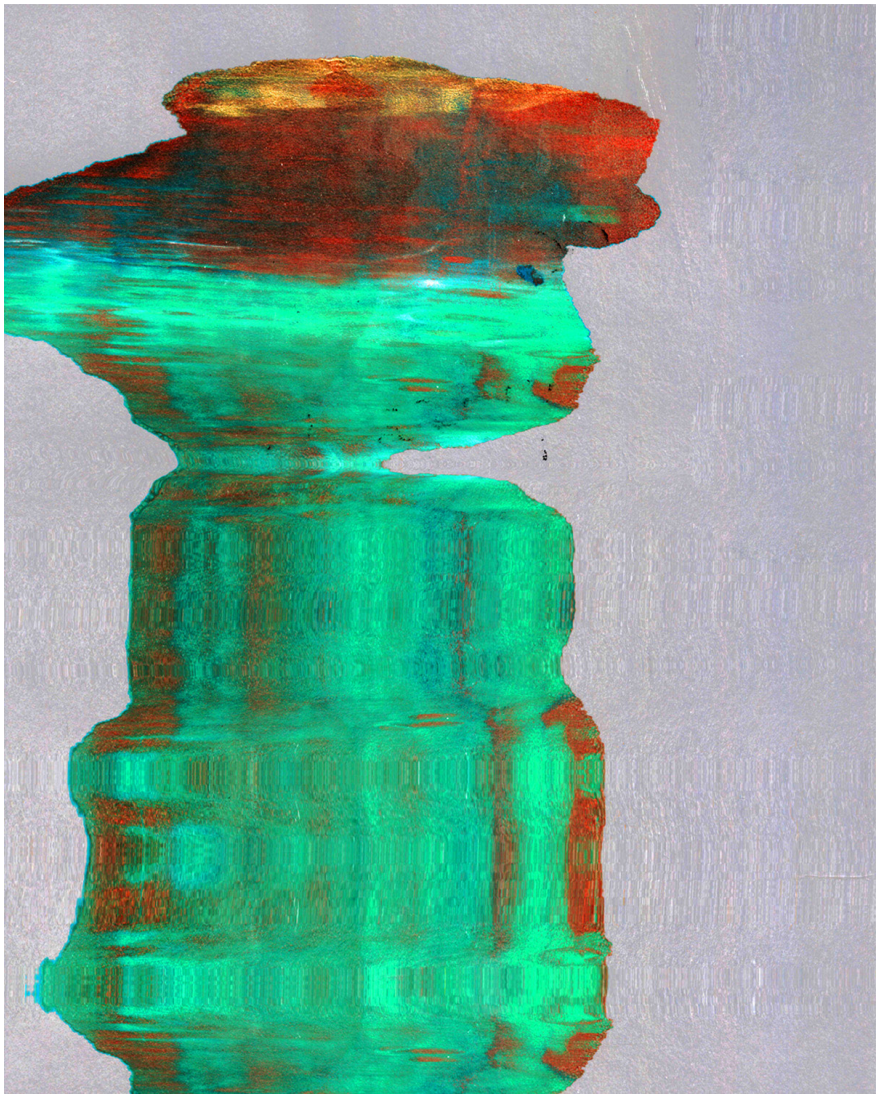
Jessica Pye

"Recently, I have been investigating the notion of silence as a tool to my practice, relinquishing distraction and removing any visual in influence that music may have been having on my work."

I am a Fine Art student from Manchester studying at Nottingham Trent University, studying Italian alongside my degree.

My practice builds on the materiality of colour, investigating how colour can affect your eye in such intense ways along with the meditative state that certain processes bring me into. The physical act of painting and screen printing require deep concentration, leading me to question the need for and use of other aspects that build the state of flow I work in: music, morning time in nature, exercise. Recently I have been investigating the notion of silence as a tool to my practice, relinquishing distraction and removing any visual influence that music may have been having on my work. I find I have a high sensitivity to my surroundings, especially the colour of them. The seasons affect my mind-set towards work and I like to surround myself in nature at some point each day. My emotions heighten when outside and this I feel influences how I then respond to work and ideas in the studio. I read a lot into spirituality, specifically the Laws of Attraction and I see this constantly improving my response to things not going to plan, time management and failing fast, failing forward. I use it in all aspects of life and believe it allows me to be more open to opportunities, lessons and see my struggles in a different light. Living and working in Rome, Italy for three months this year opened my eyes more to this in my independence and reaction to being alone and not always having plans turn out in the best or safest way.

This work speaks of contradicting the traditional hand-crafted method of screen-print by manipulating and distorting the products of this process digitally. The procedure of screen print is very repetitive and ritualistic in the set up and the way in which you make each piece of work. The fusion of this conventional process with digital manipulation (scanning and dragging the work to distort the image, then editing the hue and saturation in Photoshop) not only extends the lengthy procedure of creating each piece but also disturbs the historical conversation that the work has. Within my practice I reflect on the spontaneous and unplanned, especially with regards to colour. Because of this I use hand-ripped stencils to print through, or discard stencils altogether and use the squeegee as a painting tool. Within each work there is visible movement throughout, and I feel each provide an evident reflection on the heavy process that has led up to the finished image.



Enough of This

the world is a dream before 10:
a daily edict of the sleep-dependent
still protecting themselves from morning

i sleep with hands in loose fists
compromising
between gaping aggression
and torrid acceptance of
the many ways a body can be broken

when i was younger i fantasized of
punching a needle through my
earlobes in a silent scream:
does being seen mean to hurt like this?

not healthy enough
not disabled enough
not straight enough
not queer enough

if i line my baggage in neat little
suitcases on your doorstep pointing
at each one and naming its pain
the last is this thing i call my body

pristine casing and rusted innards

i am swaying as if at sea.
can you hear the wind
in my ears?
can you see these pinpricks by my eyes?
(is it too romantic to call them stars?)

when i pluck myself open inside i am made of
the first morning's light
a saltless evening
the color of a child's laughter

asking *is this enough*
of the sleepy sunrise.

Johanna Bear

"To me, poetry is the truest kind of expansion. It is an opening of self, an exposing, a reaching for something clearer, for something more beautifully volatile."

To me, poetry is the truest kind of expansion. It is an opening of self, an exposing, a reaching for something clearer, for something more beautifully volatile. It is an unfurling of pain and tenderness and an offering to a reader to curl up within that opening, to feel that ache, that tendering. To find a voice through someone else's. This poem interrogates the rituals of identity, both those that one constructs and those that are constructed without one's consent and how to navigate systems not designed with certain communities or identities or experiences in mind. It is a raging and a claiming of the complicated relationship one can have with their body: the isolation and the safety, the loathing and the loving.

Johanna Bear is a queer and disabled writer, figure skater, actress, reader, college student and intersectional feminist with a deep love for queer theory, chocolate cake and musical theatre. A three-time national award-winning writer through the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards, her work has been published in *The Best Teen Writing of 2012*. Johanna is a current sophomore at Franklin and Marshall College where she plans on majoring in Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies and Theatre.

Brenda York

"I feel that creating art is a form of communication. It's a way to narrate life and try to make sense of common human experiences."

Glad Tidings From The Fork In The Road

As far back as I can remember, I have drawn and painted faces. In fact, there is much evidence pointing to the fact that I spent an inordinate amount of time drawing Sister Mary Francis Catherine in 3rd Grade instead of paying attention to math class. In addition to my studies of the good Sister MFC, I also earned a BFA at Arizona State University and continued my fine art training at Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, The Athenaeum in La Jolla, and Idyllwild Arts Academy.

I feel that creating art is a form of communication. It's a way to narrate life and try to make sense of common human experiences. It's also a way to re-frame your personal life story. I do several outdoor art fairs every year, and I keep a running list of the crazy questions I get. Then I'll post the top 7-10 wackiest questions on my blog every year, and the most frequently asked question is, "Did you do a lot of psychedelic drugs in your youth?" Go figure.

Most of the paintings I've made recently have been about letting go of rituals. That seems to be a theme in my life, and it therefore inspires the paintings I make. It's about being open to the next chapter.

All my paintings start out as tiny little sketches in my Moleskine sketchbook. I do tons of 1 in. to 2 in. thumbnail sketches every week, so when it's painting time I always have plenty of material to work with. Sometimes, when I am planning for a show that has a theme, I will dedicate a sketchbook to that show so I can see how the ideas for the paintings work together. All of my paintings come from my imagination but I find plenty of inspiration in real life—it's stranger than fiction!

My color choices are mostly instinctual. I almost always start with complementary colors—I love the tension that occurs with colors that are opposites on the color wheel. I don't over-think my choices except to push myself to try new combinations once in a while. In the final stages of a painting, I will try to repeat colors, (especially background colors), and I use glazes to pull together a composition and create harmony. I always paint on black gessoed canvas. I came to my current style by looking, practicing, and looking more, and then just showing up to do the work, almost every single day. I work mostly in acrylic paint and mixed media. Lately, I've been including some bits of collage to shake things up a little.

My work used to be very realistic, (yes, I can draw a portrait that actually looks like a real human being—hard to believe, huh?), but I wasn't excited about the work. I started looking at art that did interest me, analyzing what made my heart skip a beat. I even started an inspiration book of images of other artists' work that I admired. Now I keep Pinterest board called Art I Love that I peruse in times of inspirational black holes.

Over time, it became obvious to me what types of images I was drawn to and also what I felt was missing in my own work: whimsy, color, symbolism, narrative content, etc. I started incorporating these elements into my work, but it didn't happen overnight. Painting nearly every day has pushed me through the phases of developing my style much faster than if I was working on only larger pieces over a greater span of time.

Left; not quite perfect knit I, Right; not quite perfect knit II

Michelle MacKinnon

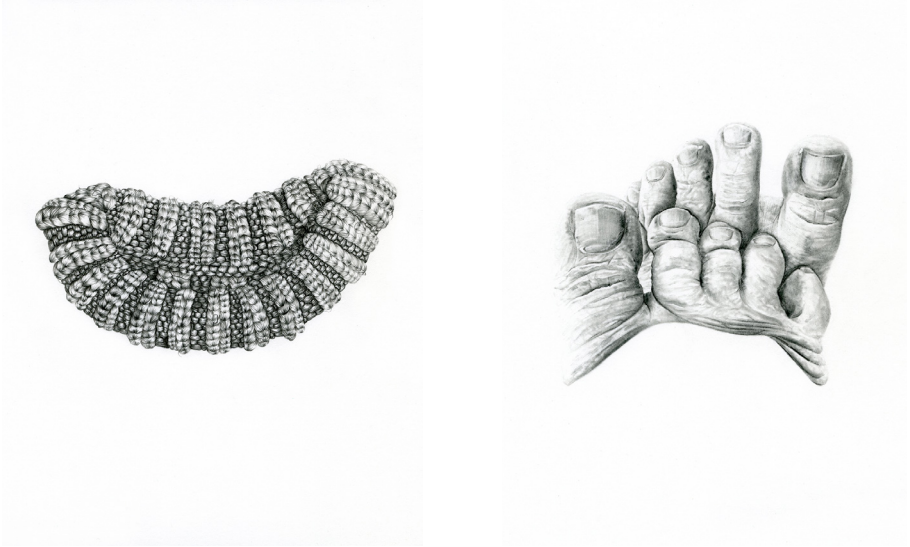
"Since, I have lived in twelve different homes in the past three years, familiarizing myself with places, objects and people has become comforting in its ritual."

My practice dwells on the (un)familiarities of home and what happens when its sentiment becomes disconnected, dislocated and ambiguous. I navigate the threshold of when commonplace becomes anomalous in my ongoing transient displacement; not being without a home, but rather the feeling when a traditional idea of home is suddenly dismantled.

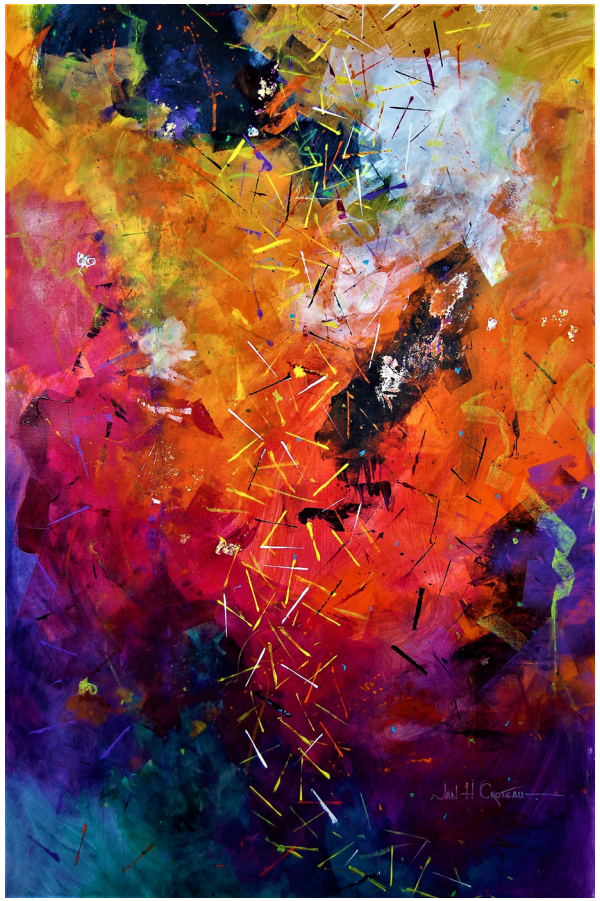
My drawings are an investigation and documentation of my ongoing time spent in various places and spaces since abruptly leaving my family home, and how people, objects and memories work to foster a sense of connection and belonging. In August 2016, my partner and I had the opportunity to temporarily work in Corner Brook, Newfoundland and in the same week, my family announced that they would be moving, leaving the home we grew up in. After arriving in Newfoundland and initially feeling out of sorts and displaced, the concept of home has evolved into something that is continuously pondered and pieced together: the people with me and away from me, the objects I brought and the objects I stored or donated, and the many places I have resided in. Since, I have lived in twelve different homes in the past three years, familiarizing myself with places, objects and people has become comforting in its ritual.

I explore how the notion of home can endure and evolve within people and objects, and what its existence beyond spatial and temporal boundaries may be. In a fragmented state that exists between the real and remembered, the objects I draw are intimately preserved to create a mapping of sorts – a rendering of the once familiar. They drift between the deconstruction and adoration of things and people in an attempt to (re)familiarize and fit myself into a new understanding of what was, or still could be, home.

not quite perfect is an ongoing series of drawings that stem from my time in Corner Brook, Newfoundland, and has been ongoing in the various cities I have lived in since. During that time, I purchased and was given many handknit items: sweaters, socks, hats, mittens, scarves, etc. These pieces, with their handmade imperfections, have a heart-warming sense of charm within them. The subsequent drawings, both fragmented knits and body parts, were done in attempt to spend intimate time connecting with the pieces and recreating myself within them. Knit as drawings are disconnected from their more utilitarian intent—they can no longer serve the purposes associated with clothing and warmth, but rather, in their drawn state, act as a record and symbol of time and place. Through drawing these systematically structured knits, I attempt to calm the desire for permanence and observe the different presence/patterns that exist within a state of transience.



Clockwise from top left; not quite perfect knit III, not quite perfect knit IV, not quite perfect knit XV, not quite perfect knit XVI



Truth and Beauty

Jan Croteau

"The territory of my inner landscape is the inspiration for my art work and my writing."

I work in two studios. One is upstairs where I paint. That's where beauty resides.

The other studio is its own separate building on our land where I teach creativity to women and where truth is often revealed. My most popular class is The Heroine's Journey Through Art. This is a place where we explore our inner life through the avenues of writing and drawing. I've been an artist my whole life. I founded a Shakespearean Theater Company and ran it for 20 years. Now I'm in my third act.

The third act is not the final act in many full-length plays, but it's definitely the act that brings a great deal of insight into the heart of the protagonist of any script, and it's a spiritual place for women. Our third act can be a place of immense power and creativity. I paint on a regular basis and my work informs my daily actions. The territory of my inner landscape is the inspiration for my art work and my writing.

This new body of work is titled "I've Been So Abstracted Lately". I let the journey take me into the realm of pure color and movement, the expression of energetic fields merging to create a space where Truth and Beauty live together.

Untitled

pages

Sophie Klerk

"I cherish the faded, old and broken and I am naturally drawn to more subtle colours and tones which might have something to do with my Nordic background."

I am a Danish collage artist currently living and working in Wellington, New Zealand. I love travelling and being exposed to new places and cultures. I have lived and worked in Denmark, England, Holland and Mexico and I have always felt that being a foreigner is freedom from having to fit into a box.

I graduated with a degree in graphic design and worked in design and illustration for a variety of international clients. I was co-director of a multifunctional project space The Green Bench in New Zealand. I now work as a full-time artist and exhibit regularly in group and solo shows and undertake collaborations and commissions on request.

I work very intuitively and allow the unexpected to emerge. I embrace uncertainty, recognising that some questions are more valuable than their answers. I cherish the faded, old and broken and I am naturally drawn to more subtle colours and tones which might have something to do with my Nordic background. I create my artwork by layering paper, found materials and paint combined with my own photography and found anonymous images. I am intrigued by the relationship between colours, texture, and shapes and build up stories in my compositions. The layered and stitched together collages create contrasts that evoke echoes of the past and present.

part one

paper sculpture

Stefanie Stark

"When I work more abstractly, I still draw from nature and the sense it gives me of a bigger, wider, awe-inspiring world around us."

I grew up surrounded by original art and fresh flowers. My parents collected art, and my mother arranged a constant flow of fresh flowers she placed throughout our house. She cut stems, chose the perfect vessel, and arranged blooms just so in our kitchen while I watched and sometimes helped.

My mother and her flowers taught me about beauty. Perhaps it's no surprise that flowers of all shapes, sizes and colors inspire me. Abstract blooms often find a way into my paintings, and through them, I feel a connection to my late mother, who died before I began to paint. Flowers and nature remind me of the fragility of life and the bigger awe-inspiring world around us. Feelings of wonder, amazement, love, loss, pain, hope and even transcendent connection move from within me to my artwork.

I start by selecting colors and laying the paints out on a table. Using brushes, sponges, paper towels and sometimes my fingers, I intuitively combine different shades, watching them merge and blend on the canvas before me. Oil pastel marks and scribbles add dimension and interest, as do purposeful drips made from watery paint. These elements help convey a sense of movement, flow and emotion. Each brushstroke or mark informs my next step. Eventually, the painting takes on a life of its own and dictates what it needs. My hope is that my work draws viewers into a visual world of beauty and emotion.

Variegated Bouquet

Daina Savage

"My work addresses what is lost along the way. I employ lessons of the natural world in making meaning."

A first-generation American, I explore ideas of memory that get imbedded in the body's cells, manifesting as they pass along the matriarchal line. My work addresses what is lost along the way. I employ lessons of the natural world in making meaning.

My collection, *Traces*, was published by I. Giraffe Press in 2013. I was the Poet Laureate of Lancaster, PA, where I ran writing workshops and directed spoken word events for more than 20 years. I now live in the woods of the Appalachian mountains.

How to Live, Riga 1939-2017

Butter the black
bread. Snip sheaves
of dill fold
into sour
cream. Line
up the sprats
like little soldiers,
gold of their scales
winking in the morning
light.

Remember the taste
of hunger. Fry
bacon. Render
onions translucent
as ration-cards
in sweaty
hands.

Fill your plate
with gratitude.

Let there be enough
now.
Be enough
now.

Dog Days

It was summer as long as I could remember,
shimmering in waves of heat from the pavement
We'd throw stones to the air at dusk, watching bats veer off course,
the lake lapping at our toes
We sipped the nectar of air
Cut combs of honey with our fierce longing
Fireflies blinking past, as ghosts ferrying between worlds of what was and what will be

We were children of delight
and terror in the days the stretched endlessly

Dipping as otters along the shoreline
We hunted crayfish, scooped handfuls of mud
Painted as warriors, we stalked the wild things
Catching dragonflies and watersnakes and
the fearsome snapping turtle that bit the broomstick in half.

It was a careless time of danger
Broken bones from the desire for flight
Cracked teeth and ribs and toes.
Our bodies bruised purple and gold.

We waged wars and brokered peace
While the parents threw cocktail parties that lasted till sunrise
their aching guitars drifting into our dreams.

This is the beginning of sadness
This stretch of unbroken time,
the color of memory bright as a new penny,
round and whole and full of light.

sammys balcony

Ashleigh Trim

"I take mundane or ordinary places and turn them into surreal, dreamlike scenes that the viewer can place themselves inside."

Painting is my diary. I take images of places I've been, memories I have, captured moments and the emotions that come with them. I translate them into landscapes with enhanced colour and altered perspectives. I become fascinated with movement, the shift of an object or the distortion of a reflective surface. I focus on empty space, how this can be used to create form. I take mundane or ordinary places and turn them into surreal, dreamlike scenes that the viewer can place themselves inside.

I paint with mostly oil on canvas, enjoying the fluidity of the marks I can gain from the paintbrush. I can use the paint to manipulate my ideas, working in multiple layers and adding or changing elements as the painting unfolds.

Addie DeLong

"I work with both traditional and non-traditional mediums to create tension-filled abstract works that question the effects of control in relationships with others and with ourselves. "

I work with both traditional and non-traditional mediums to create tension-filled abstract works that question the effects of control in relationships with others and with ourselves.

I am inspired by the journey rocks go through: cycles of erosion and formation.

ac · cre · tion - process of growth or increase, typically by the gradual accumulation of additional layers or matter.
e · ro · sion - the gradual destruction or diminution of something.

The abstract paint forms represent our truest selves. The graphite lines are in themselves a controlling action that penetrate and break up these paint forms. I use chemical reactions during the painting process to create a corrosive feeling in the works; it reflects the erosion and sedimentary covering up of our true selves. I hope to inspire others to shine through the layers of silt, to build back up what has been eroded, and to let go of our own desire to control those closest to us (including ourselves!)

I have my B.S. in Fine Art and Business from Eastern Oregon University. I live and work in Bend, Oregon, and adventure locally and globally with my husband and husky! Our wild central Oregon landscapes inspire me, as well as our travels - most recently to the peak of Mt. Kilimanjaro.

Losing myself V

Slowly Over Time II

Isabella Borgeson

"I write poems, because I know that climate change is a present-day threat to my family, to island nations, to people of color communities across the world. I write because I come from histories of people who learned we must write our stories, or they will be erased."

I sometimes joke I only write poems about my mama or the ocean. But it's true. They were my first storytellers. Much of my work is influenced by and speaks on the impact of super typhoon Haiyan on my family's hometown. In November 2013, I moved to the Philippines to join my mama in grassroots community organizing efforts to rebuild after the typhoon. I understand from the legacy of June Jordan that "poetry is a political act, because it involves telling the truth." I write poems, because I know that climate change is a present-day threat to my family, to island nations, to people of color communities across the world. I write because I come from histories of people who learned we must write our stories, or they will be erased.

I always miss the Philippines in November. In Tanauan, I know my mama is at the cemetery, cleaning the graves of our family members. Lighting 5 peso candles. Chanting rosaries to the ghosts we visit when we sleep at the town's campo santo for All Souls Day. We visit our neighbors and exchange pandesal, candies, and drinks at their loved one's graves. I learned ritual from the ways my mama taught me to pray to my ancestors - whether at the foot of the altar in the Oakland apartment I grew up in, or while swimming in her Ocean. After the super typhoon hit our town, these rituals have taken on new meaning. We not only visit the cemetery, but also the mass grave at the traffic triangle, or in the town plaza next to the basketball courts. But still we gather. I write my mama's stories and find ritual in remembering.

campo santo

in Waray, we call our cemeteries 'campo santo' - literally translating to sacred ground.

back home, the spirits sing in the trees.
across the road, branches hang like weeping women.

who sweep the leaves, even when the winds howl.
it is November & all of Tanauan gathers in its own mouth.

to wet the ground with our melted wax. we swing
the sundang & clear the weeds arching our uncles'

graves. scrub coffins with cracked coconuts.
brush the mangled vines & debris with gihay ribs

our backs cradled in sweat. until our mamas signal
enough with the pointing of their lips. & our 10-year-old

limbs hop-scotch across stacked cement coffins.
play tag with the ghosts who carry our middle names,

beneath the moon, we greet each mano with quick
genuflection, or out-of-breath rest in peace, po

until the mosquitoes fill the holes in our pants
& we return to our mothers. who braid the sticky hairs

out of our faces. we stand still, for all of one rosary bead.
the white handkerchiefs tucked into our collars, now lost

in the holy mud of this cemetery. as we chase the steam
of boiling peanuts. race the unlit path to our family's rest.

& learn to make peace with the dead's song.

iday -

stuff your American passport / into the
mouth of a gallon sized water jug / should
the storm surge flood / our house again / tita
will tie the bottles around your waist / to help
you float / after the typhoon / your blue
booklet will bring down the helicopters / that
only land for citizens / of other countries /
lay a hammer & crowbar beneath your
pillow tonight / use this to break open the
ceiling / climb the manhole to the roof /
should you drown here / my ghost will never
sleep.

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